

Technology and Human Interaction as the Next Era of Contemporary Curating  
Research Thesis

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by

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**Abstract:** This paper documents my investigation into contemporary curating through practical research at Urban Arts Space. As an Arts Management undergraduate in the Department of Arts Administration, Education, and Policy, I aimed to implement various theories of contemporary curating by curating the Ohio State University's Bachelor of Fine Arts show in Autumn 2018, I have acted as a liaison between artist and viewer and artist and institution. Because of the physical limitations of Urban Arts Space's gallery and the lack of cohesion between exhibiting artists and mediums, exhibition design was secondary in my role as curator. I sought nontraditional methods through social media content and audience building to engage with viewers, which will become vital for nonprofit arts institutions relevance in the future such as filming artists and their creative processes. I used academic sources by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Adrian George, and Paul O'Neill to inform my research theoretically including meeting with artists individually to learn the creative processes and document their work, conducting artist interviews, and writing promotional texts.

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## I. Introduction: Curatorial Practices

Throughout my undergraduate career, I have been fortunate to have multiple experiences with curating exhibitions. I realized designing an exhibition was something I had a knack for. I've always been very visual and able to arrange objects together in a way that makes sense. From decorating my apartment to picking out my outfits, visual organization comes naturally to me. In the summer before my final semester of college, I worked at the Columbus Museum of Art: an institution aiming to shift towards being visitor-centric. I had a question gnawing at me all summer: if nonprofit art institutions and organizations are shifting away from objects and gaining interest in visitor experience, what does the next era of contemporary curating look like? Knowing I wanted to do a research distinction project, I decided to frame my thesis around this question. I began to research the history of curating, the growing revolution of visitor-centric cultural institutions, and the theories revolving around the growing profession of curating. Famed contemporary curator, Hans Ulrich Obrist, stressed in his book, *Ways of Curating*, that a curator is meant to act as a liaison between artwork (or artist) and viewer. I was struck because if a majority of the general public doesn't have a basic knowledge of the art field or art history, how are they supposed to understand an artwork in a museum? One thought was clear to me after working at the Columbus Museum of Art for nine months: most of the visitors I interacted with did not like contemporary art. I realized this was because they don't *understand* contemporary art since not only is it so conceptual, it's also contextual. It certainly helps to have a background in 20th century art history in order to fully understand contemporary art. As an Arts Management undergraduate student also pursuing a minor in History of Art, I know that I am included in a field that not many know about. As I thought about these notions over and over, I came to the

conclusion I couldn't write a research paper about this visitor-centered movement that is still developing. Instead, I had to figure out for myself what contemporary curating felt like.

I initially began this project academically researching theories of contemporary curating and its history. My plan was to theorize the next era of contemporary curating given what I know about the arts management field and curatorial field. After meeting a few times with my thesis faculty advisor, Dana Carlisle Kletchka, assistant professor in the Department of Arts Administration, Education, and Policy, we came to the conclusion it would be much more beneficial to experience practical research rather than academic. While I could center my research around hypothesizing what the next era of contemporary curating could be, it would be much more valuable to figure it out through first-hand experience. Every author I read in my research discussed how the theory of curating is completely different from the actual practice. Adrian George particularly stressed this notion in *The Curator's Handbook*. George also emphasizes the importance of minding others' egos and personal sensitivities since a curator collaborates with many different people. Additionally, not only is a curator meant to stretch an artist's practice or serve as a translator between artwork and viewer, a curator is also responsible for writing texts, editing wall labels or marketing materials, ensure the exhibition direction is clear for exhibition teams, serve as an educator, and at times appeal to an institution's mission and values. Art is a reflection of a human's experience, and I wanted to meet and collaborate with real artists in order to learn their experiences. I kept George's words in mind and set out to find an exhibition or group of artists with whom I could work closely.

## II. Exhibition Strategies

I have been working as a student exhibition assistant at the Ohio State University's Urban Arts Space for the last year and a half. Coincidentally, Urban Arts Space is where a majority of Ohio State student art shows are held. With the help and advice from my thesis advisor, Dana Carlisle Kletchka, and my supervisors at Urban Arts Space, I was given the incredible opportunity to curate the Autumn 2018 Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) show. My supervisors include Merijn van der Heijden, Director; Emily Oilar, Operations and Program Manager; Erik Pepple, Director of Communications; and Jeremy Stone, Senior Preparator. I am the first student to curate a show in any capacity and it's been an incredible honor. I knew I wanted to keep two factors in mind when curating this show. First, I understood there were numerous physical limitations in the gallery space after helping design and install multiple shows during my time at Urban Arts Space. I also knew that this was not a cohesive group show. The artists did not have a theme they were all supposed to follow nor were they even all the using the same medium. Second, it was vital to me to learn who each artist is as a person, how his/her experiences inform his/her work, and what his/her creative processes are. With these factors in mind, my ultimate research question formed. With so many physical limitations of Urban Arts Space's gallery, the lack of conceptual continuity between the artwork, and the limited amount of written materials that typically accompany this show, how could I, acting curator, translate the artists' work to the viewer? Since I was the first student to curate a student show in any capacity, I was swimming in uncharted waters. Much of my methodology formed as the weeks progressed and as I worked with each artist. There were a total of 14 artists exhibiting at the show this fall (table 2.1).

Jeremy Stone, Urban Arts Space's senior preparator, sent out an introduction email at the beginning of the semester explaining guidelines and deadlines for the show as well as introducing my project. I followed up his email with my own explaining my role as curator and asking for any volunteers. My email included the following:

My goal for this show is to provide you all with multiple platforms to introduce yourselves as artists to the world. In order to do this, myself and a few of Urban Arts Space's videographers (Aubrey Elder, Johnny Elder, and Brynne McGregor) would love the opportunity to observe/document time you spend in your studios, works in progress you have, or anything else you have to offer to supplement your work. We'll be putting together a video montage or two from the semester to accompany and promote the show in the weeks leading up to it. We will also be conducting artist interviews to those who are interested. Again, participation is optional, but it will be a great opportunity to have your work showcased prior to and during the exhibition. This show is all about you, and I'd love to highlight your work in the best way possible.

Seven out of the 14 artists exhibiting this year volunteered to participate in this research project (highlighted in table 2.1), and I felt humbled to have so many willing participants. I wanted to make sure the artists were as heavily promoted as possible, and I realized social media would be the most accessible outlet for us to work with which I will discuss more in depth in this paper. With three videographers accompanying me on each meeting with artists and documenting our interactions, we were able to record each artist's preparation, creation, and final product. My goal was to discover who they are as artists and what their creative processes are and translate that to the viewer through a series of social media posts, earned editorial from various publications around Columbus, and of course, through the design of the exhibition. We took this footage and created videos and images to post on social media, Urban Arts Space's website, and the Ohio State University's College of Arts and Science's website. I also created

artist profiles for two of the artists for these websites and were also sent out to various local publications. The week before install, I sat down with each of the artists for one-on-one interviews that the videographers then edited to include the footage we recorded throughout the semester into one video. Finally, immediately prior to the closing reception, I will moderate a discussion panel with three of the artists to allow them to speak about their work in front of a live audience as well as Facebook Live.

Laura Black	Art and Technology
Tyler Colon	Art and Technology
Jacob Devlin	Printmaking
Christopher Lam	Art and Technology
Cristina Feret	Art and Technology
Kelsey McShane	Art and Technology
Candi Hall	Painting and Drawing
Avery McGrail	Painting and Drawing
Nick Durham	Photography
Ashley Hale	Photography
Shelby Lowe	Photography
Aly Moore	Photography
Emily Van Bramer	Photography
Ziqi Zhou	Photography

*Table 2.1.* Table of exhibiting 2018 Autumn BFA artists. November 20, 2018.

This semester has been a whirlwind of creativity, stress, and conversation—all things I thrive on. I feel so fortunate to have had the opportunity of meeting with seven BFA artists who



are exhibiting at Urban Arts Space this December and the fact that they allowed me to impose on a process that is so vulnerable and intimate. I am so incredibly grateful to my friends and fabulous videographers I worked with from Urban Arts Space—Brynne McGregor, Aubrey Elder, and Johnny Elder. I met with four photographers (Ziqi Zhou, Shelby Lowe, Nick Durham, and Aly Moore), two painting majors (Avery McGrail and Candi Hall), and one art and technology major (Kelsey McShane). I structured my initial meetings with them as very informal. I asked to meet with them for an hour at a time in their studios or workspaces so I could see the environments in which they create and casually get to know them through two or three meetings. I would first ask them their mediums, why they chose to study that medium, and how they became interested in art. I would then try to ask questions regarding the concepts behind their work: What reactions are you trying to evoke out of the viewer? Are there any recurring motifs or themes within your work? Is your senior thesis exemplary of work you've made in the past? The outlines of the meetings that follow highlight each artist's personality. Art, in my opinion, is the most vulnerable, brave, and emotional thing a person can do. Because I knew the design of the exhibition would be secondary, learning the artists' personalities was incredibly important to me since I would be trying to act as a liaison between artist and viewer in nontraditional ways. The videographers created two one-minute trailers of the artists for social media and the UAS website, and we offered an opportunity for the artists to participate in an Instagram Takeover as well.

### III. Artist Meetings

My first meeting was with Ziqi Zhou and Brynne at the Book Loft in German Village in late September. Ziqi was meeting with one of her four models for a shoot and was pressed for time, so I didn't have a chance to speak with her. Instead, I quietly observed her for an hour and noted how she worked with the model. This was all happening while Brynne documented us via film. Ziqi switched between a digital and a wide frame camera taking pictures of her male model around the Book Loft. Ziqi worked quietly and meticulously. She frequently told her model to pose however he felt most comfortable. I thought this was interesting given how models are usually used in photography. They are typically less of an autonomous subject and more of a figure within a frame. Ziqi telling her model to pose how he felt granted him autonomy and made him an active part of her photographs. At the end of the photoshoot, she sat him down and set up



Figure 3.1. Samples of Ziqi Zhou's BFA thesis.  
October 23, 2018

her camera to view just his eyes. All of Ziqi's models were met through mutual friends. Ziqi didn't know any of her models personally until the shoot. She asked each model to pick a place around Columbus that meant something special to him/her. To accompany the photographs she took of the models, Ziqi also filmed their eyes and asked the models to describe to her why they chose their specific locations. The model at the Book Loft found it to be a place of refuge since he moved to Columbus. I was fascinated by the differences between photographing the model and filming him. When he

was posing for photographs, he was effortless and confident. When he

was being filmed, his voice was shaking, he was wringing his hands, and he was clearly uncomfortable. By filming her models asking an extremely vulnerable question, Ziqi reiterates that her models are more than just figures—they are self-sustaining subjects. I think in this way, her photographs almost become performance art with the models as performers. I met with Ziqi again a couple weeks later to sit down and pick her brain about her art. I was pretty much on point with what I had observed. Although she didn't outright say it, Ziqi was interested in the human condition and vulnerability of her subjects. She showed me the photographs and videos of her other three models, and I was stunned. One of the shoots of her models took place in her childhood home where she had found her dad's body after he died. Telling the story of why the model had chosen that location with the camera focused on her eyes literally made me cry. It was so emotional and vulnerable, and I am so impressed with her work. Ziqi was fantastic to work with. She responded to every email I sent, was great to communicate with, and was eager to participate in every opportunity I offered (Z. Zhou, personal communication, September 29, 2018 and October 23, 2018).

The second artist I met with was Avery McGrail (Aubrey served as videographer this time). Avery was a stark contrast to Ziqi. Avery's concentration throughout her undergraduate career was painting, but for her thesis she turned her attention to handmade felt objects. I will also note that painting majors are the only fine arts majors who have their own studios in Hopkins Hall. The other artists I worked with expressed their wishes to also have studios as it certainly



Figure 3.2. Examples of Avery McGrail's felt objects. October 3, 2018

makes doing their practice harder given time and space constraints without one. Avery had always sewed as a hobby and has always had an interest in working with her hands. This past summer, Avery did a fine arts residency at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art where her mentors encouraged her to pursue her interest in sewing. Her residency was so impactful on her art that she decided to turn away from painting all together for her senior thesis. For the theme of the felt objects she created, she asked her friends and family what objects bring them comfort. She's created small, representational objects from cigarettes to lollipops to balloons. Her goal was for the represented figures to be as realistic and close to the object it is referencing as possible. To present her thesis, Avery wanted to create at least 100 objects to be placed on a table as a type of collage installation but ended up making around 50. Another recurring motif in her work throughout undergraduate was collage, so it was interesting to see her represent the style in a very three-dimensional way. Through her small comfort-inspired figures, Avery hoped to evoke the "ooey gooey feelings of childhood." Her work really spoke to how I perceived her as both a person and an artist. She was a little self-conscious but talkative and excited. Because of this, she made for a great person to talk with and get to know. She was very open and honest about the themes and emotions behind her work, which again, evokes peace and playfulness. Aubrey and I met with Avery a second time a couple weeks later to document her working. She had been working on a "My Little Pony" figurine, and we managed to record her for half an hour for a time-lapse video for social media (A. McGrail, personal communication, 2018).

As we were leaving our first meeting with Avery, she quickly asked us if we had time to work with another artist—her friend and colleague, Candi Hall. Candi's studio was across the room from Avery, and she emerged even more self-conscious than Avery. Candi apologized for

not responding to my initial email asking for participants. She was nervous and unsure if she wanted to participate. This is understandable since artwork is obviously something deep and personal to the artist, and I was asking the artists to take it even further and allow me to dissect their vulnerabilities. Candi Hall was fascinating. I think her work was very reflective of her personality. She had been working on a large-scale painting (maybe 3x5 feet) for the last two months and would be presenting this and one other for her BFA thesis. They are so layered both literally and figuratively. The amount of thought that goes into her paintings and their materiality was baffling. From

deciding whether to use oil paint or acrylic to taking art historical context into consideration, every single aspect of her paintings had a



*Figure 3.3. Candi Hall and Naomi Kennedy in Candi's studio. October 16, 2018.*

message behind it. Candi had life experiences different from the other artists I worked with as she is 31 and has a daughter. Since she was so subdued in my first meeting with her, I was a little surprised when I met with her for a second time two weeks later as she was eager to talk and very confident. I had maybe caught her off guard in that initial meeting since it wasn't planned and very last minute. She was fantastic to formally interview as well. Candi has a clear idea of what her art means visually and to herself (C. Hall, personal communication, 2018)

The following week was chaotic as I met with four artists, three of which I hadn't met before: Aly Moore, Kelsey McShane, and Shelby Lowe. Aly had vaguely told me via email about how her project revolved around an installation and her studio was in her apartment. I absolutely love installations, so I was eager to meet with her. Brynne and I met with her in her apartment where she had a considerable amount of Dollar Store party supplies, a large format camera, and plenty of natural sunlight. Aly described her work as creating unusual set designs and photographing them. Her process included going to the dollar store and buying in bulk any sort of product that interests her. When we visited her, she was creating a set with fake hair, handheld mirrors, and bologna. These objects, are of course, very odd and unsettling when



Figure 3.4. Set design by Aly Moore. October 21, 2018.

placed together. Aly said her work often explored making her viewers uncomfortable. Meat was actually a recurring motif in her work. I wasn't satisfied with her answer for making art that simply made people uncomfortable. I wanted to know *why*. I asked her a number of questions trying to figure out her thought process behind her work. She

seemed unable to answer any of my questions and ultimately unsure of the rationale behind her work. When I asked her how she first picked up photography, she told a story of it initially being a hobby in high school. She was indecisive about what she wanted to do with her life after high school, moved out to California before coming to Ohio State, and explored many avenues in her academic life switching majors



multiple times. Her exploratory view on life is reflected in the constantly changing nature of her work. For her final presentation at Urban Arts Space, Aly used two walls perpendicular to each other. On one wall, she displayed her photographs. On the other, she mimicked one of her set designs like repetitive mirrors or fake hair (A. Moore, personal communication, 2018).

A couple days after meeting with Aly, Johnny and I met with Shelby Lowe in the lighting studio at Hopkins Hall. Coincidentally, Aly and Shelby are friends, so Aly was there as well. Shelby was working with five models (including herself) who all happened to be friends she knew through her love of skiing. Everyone has different levels of risk they feel comfortable pursuing. Shelby decided to explore the boundaries of recklessness as skiers by creating a cellophane wall, cutting slits in the wall, and asking her models to step through the wall based on how reckless they think they are. The further out he/she stepped, the more of a risk-taker the skier is. Asking Shelby why she chose this subject, the initial answer was obvious—skiing is her passion. She then told me how she has a preference for commercial photography, but the programs at Ohio State tend to prefer conceptual work. In turn, her professors kept pushing her to make a thesis that was more conceptual. The fight between wanting to be commercial

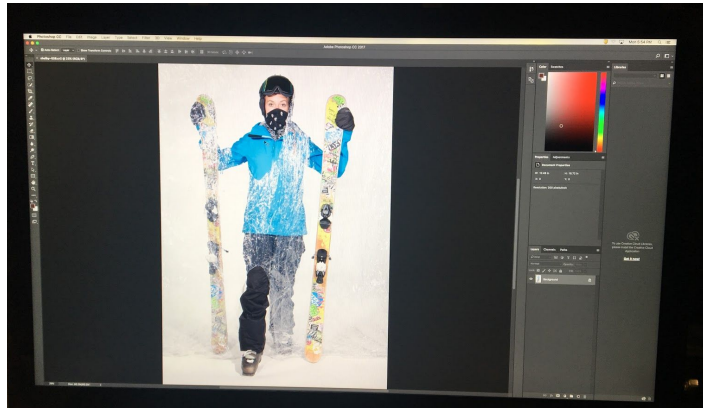


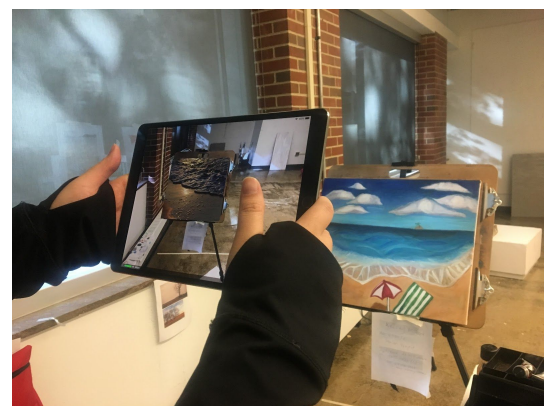
Figure 3.5. Unedited version of one of Shelby Lowe's photographs. October 22, 2018.

but being pushed in a conceptual direction was something that clearly impacted Shelby. She brought it up multiple times when meeting with her and was a central point in her artist interview. After some push and pull with her professors, she ultimately arrived to this theme for

her photography project. In order to still achieve her preference of commercial photography, Shelby placed emphasis on the studio aspects of the work like lighting and posing. For the presentation of her project, Shelby attached her prints to identical sized blocks of wood. I was really impressed by how her photographs turned out in such a large scale. I could see the commercial aspects of photography really shining through. The photographs looked like they could be hanging in a ski supply store (S. Lowe, personal communication, 2018).

The same week I met with Aly and Shelby, I met Kelsey McShane, the only art and technology major who volunteered to participate in this project. For her project, Kelsey painted a picture of a beach and use an iPad and augmented reality to animate the painting. When the painting was hanging on a wall, the viewer would be able to hold the iPad up to the painting. The iPad would show the painting, but also animations (like crabs crawling across the beach or birds in the sky) that she had created. Because I have no knowledge about augmented reality or coding, I was very interested in learning more. Kelsey has always had an interest in animation and has a background in coding and technology. The way she explained the coding and programs she used for her project were completely over my head.

Perhaps this is the grey area where art and technology do not meet. While I see that this animation is very relevant to the future of art, I think that there is a clear distinction between conceptual art and technology like augmented reality. Technology like augmented reality, on the other hand, is something that is certainly



*Figure 3.6. Kelsey McShane's augmented reality with iPad and painting. October 23, 2018.*

experiential, but it isn't always conceptual. For these reasons, I found it slightly difficult to relate



to Kelsey's work. My knowledge within the arts lie strictly within the visual and certainly not with technology. This made working with her a worthwhile experience, I got exposure to something outside of my comfort zone (K. McShane, personal communication, 2018).

The last artist I met with with photographer Nick Durham. After corresponding via email, I discovered Nick lived in his hometown of Fayetteville, a small rural town outside of Cincinnati and was only commuting to campus on Wednesdays. Because of this, it was difficult to meet with him in person. I was able to finally meet with Nick in the lighting studio of Hopkins in late October where he told me more about his project. To honor his hometown, Nick started a photo-series to highlight the beauty of Fayetteville and the town's narrative. Unfortunately, Nick experienced a number of deaths in his family in a short amount of time earlier in the semester. His grandfather lost a battle with Leukemia in September of this year, his cousin took his own life in October, and his aunt is currently in the hospital fighting for her life against cancer. Nick has tragically been forced to learn how to deal with death in an incredibly short amount of time and has done so through his family's support and love. Thus, Nick devoted his senior thesis project to commemorating his family. Over the summer, Nick discovered his aunt had super 8



Figure 3.7. Photograph of super 8 film projection on one of Nick Durham's family members. October 30, 2018.

films and of family get-togethers and vacations from three decades ago and a projector hidden in her attic. Because he has a natural interest in film and photography, Nick decided to turn them into digital copies so his family could keep the films forever without the complexities of the projector. One day,

Nick was projecting a film when his grandmother came into the room and saw an image of her

late husband. As she was jumping for joy and interacting with the film projection, Nick had a lightbulb click on in his head: he had to capture interactions with memories. For his thesis, Nick has been projecting his aunt's super 8 films onto members of his family. As they candidly interact with the projections, Nick photographs them. Afterwards, he asks them to write about the memories they have with the film and the family members it captured. Through this project, Nick has been learning to cope with the loss of family members through memories that are not his own. Unfortunately, Nick was unable to meet for a formal interview due to logistical issues. I did, however, write an artist profile for him to be published on our website so he at least received some promotion (N. Durham, personal communication, 2018).

#### **IV. Social Media Strategies Due to Physically Limiting Gallery Spaces**

After meeting with the rest of the artists individually, the videographers compiled all of the footage to create two, one minute teaser trailers for social media. I split the artists into groups of two (excluding Nick) based on their works visually and conceptually. Aly, Candi, and Avery were in a teaser trailer together, and Shelby, Kelsey, and Ziqi were in the other. Teaser trailers had never been created before for an Urban Arts Space exhibition, and the staff and artists were very excited about their final outcome. After this, we set up times for each of them to come down to Urban Arts Space for a formal, sit-down interview. We sat with chairs slightly turned towards each other with two videographers filming us from two different angles. I wanted the interviews to be more conversational than "question and answer," so I allowed the conversations to flow freely. The interviews lasted between 30-45 minutes, and each began with asking the artist to introduce his/herself and his/her medium. After meeting with the

videographers and discussing their artistic visions, we decided the interviews would revolve around each artist's ideation, creation, and final product. I would also ask the artist a challenge they faced during the semester and how they overcame it. Finally, I wrapped up each interview asking, "what is your biggest take-away from completing your undergraduate degree at the Ohio State University's fine arts program?" Aly's interview was unique from the others. Since she buys most of her materials in bulk from the Dollar Store, we decided it would be fun and creative to do a "walking interview." Brynne and I accompanied Aly on her final trip to the Dollar Store to create a separate artist interview. When all of the interviews were completed, the videographers worked to put together a single, documentary-style film. This film style had never been done in conjunction with an exhibition before at Urban Arts Space. Typically when BFA artists are interviewed, they each receive their own interview video that is cut down to five or six minutes. Additionally, there hasn't been an interviewer included in their videos. Aubrey decided she wanted me to be the subject of the documentary because of this thesis project. I kept Hans Ulrich Obrist's advice in mind when he said, "curators follow artists, not the other way around." The artists remained the subject of the documentary, but I certainly don't mind being included in the final form as interviewer.

As stated previously, all of these promotional elements were used to help supplement the show. Because of the physical limitations of the gallery space and lack of unity between artists, the design of the exhibition came second to the artist interviews and meetings. Urban Arts Space employs first year Masters of Fine Arts students, and one of their jobs is to help design the floor plan for the BFA show. I, along with four of the grad students, each created our own proposed floor plan after looking at each artist's material needs, project proposals, ideal floor space, and

artist statements. After we designed our floor plans, we were to meet as a group with Jeremy Stone and come to a finalized conclusion based off of all five proposals. Unfortunately, I was in Cleveland during the meeting and had to be looped in via email. I spoke with one of the grad students prior to the meeting and how important I thought it was that the pieces were displayed in a way that made sense visually. She completely disagreed with me and said the material needs (like speakers, televisions, etc.) were the most important factors when designing the show. Knowing I wouldn't be around to defend my floor plan during the meeting (which did in fact consider the art visually and conceptually), I emailed Jeremy and expressed my concerns. I explained that since I'd been working closely with half of the artists exhibiting, it was important to take into account the aesthetics *and* themes behind their work. Luckily, Jeremy agreed with

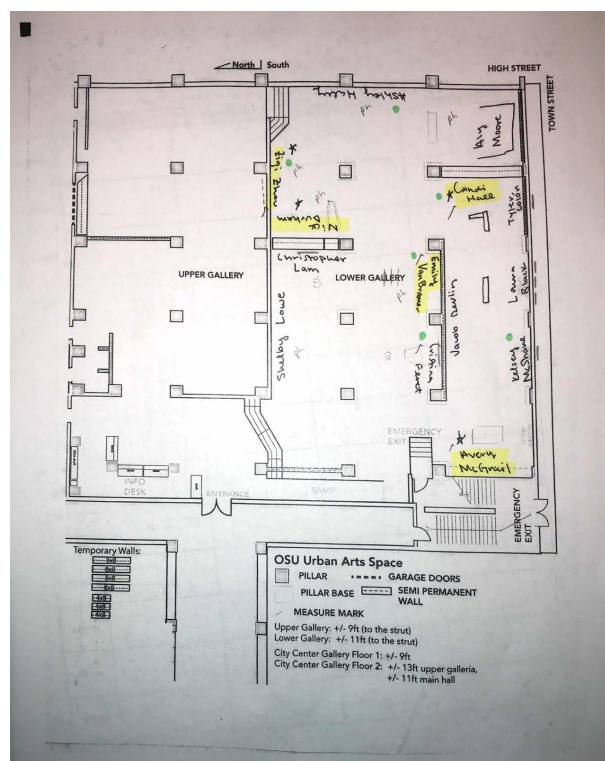


Figure 4.1. Naomi's proposed floor plan (left). November 9, 2018.

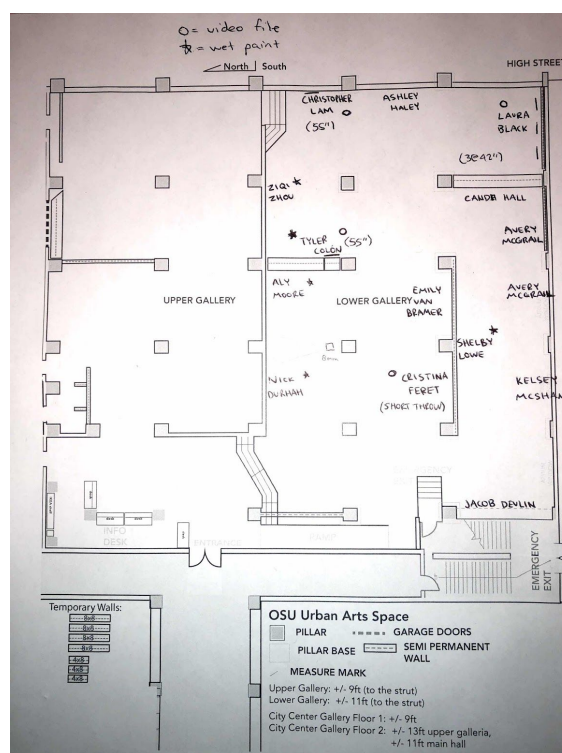


Figure 4.2. Final floor plan (right). November 9, 2018.

me. Of the 14 artists I placed throughout the gallery in my proposed floor plan, seven of them remained where I proposed for the final floor plan as seen in Figure 4.1 and 4.2. The artists that have remained where I proposed they be placed have been starred in green. The artists highlighted in yellow are those whose positions I was married to due to their visual and conceptual qualities. Not only did I have to help develop a floor plan, but I also had to edit wall label texts, paint walls, and help manually install artists' work. All of my duties were completely in line with what Adrian George had written. I had a responsibility to act as a translator between art and viewer, but I also had to write texts, edit wall labels, prepare the gallery walls for install, help install artists' work, and act as a liaison between institution (Urban Arts Space) and artists.

Although we used a lot of technology and social media as curatorial tools for the BFA show due to physical limitations, I believe this is the direction contemporary curating is heading. Social media and technology are contemporary strategies of curating that are as essential as placing objects, writing didactic materials, and installation. As nonprofit arts institutions grovel for relevance in contemporary society, many have realized the immense impact technology has in terms of visitor attendance and interaction. An extreme example would be Atelier des Lumières, Paris's first digital art museum. Its opening exhibition in the summer of 2018 featured a century of Viennese painting including work by Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, and Friedrich Stowasser. The museum was created and is operated by Culturespaces, a French museum foundation that specializes in immersive art installations. In addition to having 10-meter-high projections of masterpieces that cover a 3,300-square-meter surface area, Atelier des Lumières boasts of a room with AI technology. The digital installations at Atelier des Lumières attempt to make fine art accessible to more audiences as well draw in younger visitors (Stenson 2018). In

*Ways of Curating*, Obrist provides a brief history of curating dating back to the Late Middle Ages when it was common for artisan craftsmen to display their work publicly in festivals or other public spectacles. Obrist also notes how what they considered visual art was not displayed publicly, but rather reserved for royalty. Not only were these the people who commissioned the work, but art would often remain in their homes out of the public eye. This tradition carried on through the late 17th century with the emergence of the French Academy and their Salon exhibitions. Eventually, state-run museums were created beginning with the famed Louvre in 1793 (Obrist 2015). With public art institutions, visual art could be viewed by the public more than ever before. Today, the explosion of the internet and social media have allowed a large



Figure 4.3. Spiller, E. Visitors in La Halle space at Atelier des Lumières, Paris.  
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majority of the population to have easy access to the history of art without having to leave their homes. Along with this, cultural institutions have recognized the value in engaging with visitors

and potential visitors through various social media platforms like Instagram or Twitter. Before social media, the behind-the-scenes happenings at institutions were revealed only to those with knowledge of or access to the field. Social media has revolutionized art audiences. Rather than have an audience show up to an opening or an exhibition, an audience can be *built* prior to an opening. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York's chief digital officer Sree Sreenivasan weighed in on the issue. He said, "They [visitors] want to get a sense of how things are made. You want to build an audience before you have the big launch, rather than just sit on something and have it appear. Rather than hoping for an audience, you can build an audience," (Giridharadas 2014). Sreenivasan understands that not everyone is able to travel to New York and view an exhibition or opening in person. Instead, he is using the museum's digital presence to interact with potential and recurring audiences.

I too wanted to emulate this notion of building an audience through social media. For each artist, I aligned their Instagram Takeover date with the date they would be installing their work. Along with our teaser trailers for social media, Instagram Takeovers allowed us to build an audience prior to the reception. Urban Arts Space *does* allow visitors to walk through the gallery during exhibition install, but many visitors don't take advantage of this or even know about it. By allowing BFA artists to photograph themselves installing their work and letting audiences receive an exclusive, behind-the-scenes look at the show, Urban Arts Space can actively build an audience. Social media is also a fantastic way to work with the physical limitations of the gallery and nature of the BFA show. Paul O'Neill stresses the importance of a viewer engaging with contemporary art due to its conceptual qualities. Up until the late 19th century and destruction of Academic Art, western tradition around naturalism and representation. As O'Neill says about the



early 20th centuries' avant-garde, art became increasingly conceptual and wasn't considered "finished" until the viewer engaged with it. Whether it is mentally or physically, it is imperative for viewers to engage with contemporary art in order for the work to be understood. By doing Instagram Takeovers, we have allowed viewers to not only engage with the art they'll be seeing in the show, but they've also engaged with the actual artists. I am eager to compare this year's closing reception attendance compared to previous years.



*Figure 4.4. Screenshot of Ziqi Zhou's Instagram Takeover including a time-lapse video of her installation.*

## V. Findings and Conclusion

Towards the end of the semester I realized I had not only acted as a liaison between artists and viewers, but I acted as a much more impactful liaison between Urban Arts Space as an



institution and the artists. Staff and Urban Arts Space have continuously told me they have never had such a great response from BFA students before. This batch of students has been communicative and eager to participate in the opportunities we have provided them. In fact, the response has been so strong that UAS plans on taking my research project and converting it into one for future graduate students employed there. Aubrey and I will be meeting with the Urban Arts Space staff at the end of the semester to discuss our process throughout the semester. UAS plans to reach out to BFA students a year prior to their graduation date to bring them to UAS and begin thinking about their final thesis project. Additionally, the Ohio Channel, the parent company of local broadcasting networks, is interested in doing a piece for the BFA show this fall. I will be reaching out to three artists (Avery McGrail, Candi Hall, and Nick Durham) to be interviewed by the Ohio Channel. I will also be joining the shoots.

My ultimate goal as the BFA Autumn 2018 show's curator was to act as a translator between artists and viewers. Throughout my time at Ohio State, I've been absolutely awe-struck by the work BFA students produce. I don't think Ohio State artists receive even close to the amount of recognition and credit they deserve, and it was my hope to provide them with proper promotion. When working with artists, staff of a gallery, faculty members from a University, and graduate students, it was incredibly important to keep in mind that the goal of the show is to exhibit the artists. The BFA exhibition (or any exhibition) isn't about the curator or the staff of the gallery but about introducing student artists to their community and the world. I kept all of this in mind while working with artists and ultimately took a backseat in leading and allowed the artists to tell me what they want. If I could do the project over knowing what I know, I would create a clearer goal and directions for how to reach it. I'd sit down with the team of

videographers prior to meeting with the artists to discuss what footage we would collect, how we would compile it, and how we would distribute it. Luckily, our team of videographers are amazing and ambitious creatives, and I trusted their judgement fully. Along with this, all of the staff at Urban Arts Space was incredibly supportive of any direction we wanted to go or try. So what does the next era of contemporary curating look like? It is clear that nonprofit cultural institutions should begin to act with visitors in mind. Through my research, social media is an incredibly powerful tool for visitor engagement. This is obvious, but not every institution (like Urban Arts Space) takes advantage of this. Through using social media, institutions should post “behind-the-scenes” content in order to build an audience prior to a show as well as engage visitors in ways they can’t within the walls of the institutions. Social media is also a great way to better translate artists’ concepts to viewers than what can be found in an artist statement. Although not every institution has the capacity for state of the art technology, it is still a fantastic tool to engage with visitors and should be kept in mind when looking at an upcoming fiscal year’s budget. Finally, I found that curators act as a strong liaison between institutions and artists. With the gig economy in full swing and freelance curators becoming more popular, I’m curious to see how this will affect (if at all) relationships between artists and an institution. For a small-scale institution in a small community like Urban Arts Space, it’s vital that the artists who exhibit have a good experience with the staff and institution. This way, the institution can maintain a good reputation within the creative community locally and beyond and attract new visitors and exhibiting artists.

This entire project was experimental not only for myself as a student and future professional, but for Urban Arts Space. Urban Arts Space was able to effectively build an

audience through becoming an integral part of the artists' processes throughout the semester. Rather than waiting for the artists to drop off their work the day before installing, Urban Arts Space was able to walk alongside the artists on their journeys through the semester. After meeting with Merijn van der Heijden, Urban Arts Space's director, we were able to reflect on all of the work completed this semester. She especially emphasized how impactful our meeting with artists throughout the semester was. The staff at Urban Arts Space had talked about recording behind-the-scenes footage, but it had never been implemented. In this way, Merijn noted that we had tapped into new potential for Urban Arts Space and its marketing plans. The results of this thesis were mutually beneficial to both myself and Urban Arts Space. I hope my project is continued in the years to come, and I hope that I can continue to help this institution in any way I can. Urban Arts Space has granted me opportunities I couldn't have had anywhere else, and I'm so excited I was able to provide similar opportunities to the BFA artists. The artists I met with continually thanked me for providing them with an experience that was incredibly different from years' past. They were all so excited to receive the amount of promotion that they did from Urban Arts Space this semester. This research distinction project was so much more than just that. I provided the Autumn 2018 BFA artists with incredible opportunities, gave Urban Arts Space valuable insight and experiences, and most importantly, I grew as both an academic and professional within the arts management field. I will carry this experience with me for the rest of my life.

## Annotated Bibliography

George, A. (2015). *The Curator's Handbook*. New York, NY: Thames & Hudson.

Adrian George made a step-by-step guide for curators that explains everything from the history of curating to fundraising to the weeks leading up to an exhibition opening. Theory is much different from practice, and George certainly stressed the differences. Quoting Hans Ulrich Obrist, George stresses the importance of social engagement in contemporary curatorial practice specifically—an exhibition is like a temporary community. Along these lines, Adrian George also emphasizes the importance of minding others' egos and personal sensitivities since a curator collaborates on such a high volume. Not only is a curator meant to stretch an artist's practice or serve as a translator between artwork and viewer, a curator is also responsible for writing concise texts (for catalogues, books, or journalistic critiques), editing wall labels or marketing materials, ensure the exhibition direction is clear for exhibition teams, serve as an educator, and at times appeal to an institution's mission and values. If a curator is a permanent employee of an institution or organization, she also has to be weary of how she represents herself and an exhibition to the public—there is room for strained professional relationships through criticizing another institution or exhibition or having notoriety in the community. Although the curatorial field is becoming professionalized through academic and training programs, George also points out the differences between being a curator in practice and in theory. Much of the position is learned through experience rather than through academic texts or study. Things go wrong in real life, and a curator has to be able to deal with them in real time—studying can't prepare a curator for these experiences.

This book essentially defended my reasoning for abandoning a traditional research-based thesis and turning to a practical thesis. I wanted to explore what it meant to be a contemporary curator by actually curating an exhibition and working with artists. All of George's advice was completely applicable to my project. From minding artists' egos to having to improvise when an artist cancels an interview five minutes before it is supposed to begin, acting as a curator is a much more emotional job having to deal with humans as well as their art.

Giridharadas, A. (August 7, 2014). *Museums See Different Virtues in Different Worlds*. New York Times.

This "New York Times" article by Anand Giridharadas exemplifies how cultural and arts institutions are using social media as a way of building and retaining audiences outside of the institution rather than relying on visitor attendance.

I specifically used a quote by Sree Sreenivasan, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's chief digital officer. Sreenivasan understands that not everyone is able to travel to New York and view an exhibition or opening in person. Instead, he is using the museum's digital presence to interact with potential and recurring audiences.

Obrist, H. U., & Raza, A. (2016). *Ways of Curating*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Hans Ulrich Obrist, a well-known name in the curatorial field, wrote a unique and thoughtful book exploring curatorial history, theory, and future. Hans is one of the few curators who rejects the notion that curators also serve as "creators." *Ways of Curating* consisted of a series of essays from personal experiences Obrist has encountered throughout his years of curating. He provides a brief history of curating dating back to the Late Middle Ages when it was common for artisan craftsmen to display their work publicly in festivals or other public spectacles. Artisanal apprentices were required to display their work as best as possible. Obrist also notes how what they considered visual art was not displayed publicly, but rather reserved for royalty. While many curatorial books focus on curatorial theory and exhibitions throughout modern history, Obrist wrote anecdotes from real-life experiences.

I found Hans Ulrich Obrist's book to be practically helpful. When working with artists, staff of a gallery, faculty members from a University, and graduate students, it was incredibly important to keep in mind that the goal of the show is to exhibit the artists. The BFA exhibition (or any exhibition) isn't about the curator or the staff of the gallery but about introducing student artists to their community and the world. I kept all of this in mind while working with artists and ultimately took a backseat in leading and allowed the artists to tell me what they want.

O'Neill, P. (2016). *Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*. Mit Press.

This is the book that inspired me to think about the next era of contemporary curating taking contemporary curatorial history into account. Paul O'Neill significantly stresses the role of curator acting as a liaison to viewers. This vital role evolved as art became much more conceptual as expressionism and the avant-garde gained momentum. As art became less about the object and more about the concept, curators were necessary to facilitate the meaning to viewers and visitors of art galleries. During the avant-garde movement of the early 20th century, artists, curators, and designers moved away from passive viewership into viewers taking an active role in engaging with artwork. In this way, a work of art wasn't "complete" until the viewer engaged directly with the art. These notions are

incredibly relevant with contemporary art today, as the general public has reluctance with engaging with contemporary art. Art is no longer something beautiful on a wall but something a viewer is meant to engage with physically or at the very least mentally.

I think this is particularly useful because western art isn't just representational anymore. Artwork is incredibly conceptual, and most of the BFA students I worked with followed this notion as well. Because there were numerous limitations placed on designing the exhibition (some spaces are better suited for different mediums, the artists' desires were taken into consideration, etc.), I specifically applied O'Neill's theories to the marketing aspects of the show. As I met with artists, I constantly kept in mind that the goal is to learn who they are as artists and what their thesis projects mean and consider how to translate that to the viewer.

Stenson, B. (2018, July 26). *Paris's first digital art museum: All lit up at Atelier des Lumières*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2018/jul/26/atelier-des-lumiere-paris-digital-art-museum-klimt>

This is a short article discussing Paris' first digital art museum, Atelier des Lumières, which opened in the summer of 2018. The first exhibition featured works by Viennese masters like Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele. Unlike traditional museums with artworks simply hung on a wall, Atelier des Lumières boasts of 10 meter high digital projections of works.

I used this article as one extreme example of art institutions are embracing technology as a way to draw in new audiences and remain relevant in a society that seems to become increasingly uninterested in visiting art museums or galleries.

Spiller, E. (2018). *Visitors in the La Halle space at Atelier des Lumières, Paris* [Photograph]. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2018/jul/26/atelier-des-lumiere-paris-digital-art-museum-klimt>

Photograph used to demonstrate dramatic use of technology in Atelier des Lumières in Paris.

## **Timeline**

### **Week of 9/9 - 9/15**

- 9/14 Met with Emily Oilar, Merijn van der Heijden, and Dana Kletchka to confirm goals
  - Confirmed BFA show

### **Week of 9/16 - 9/22**

- 9/19 Met with Jeremy Stone and Emily to confirm details
  - Deadlines, dates, etc
  - Will CC me on all coordinating emails
- Jeremy sent introductory email to BFA students (including my short intro)

### **Week of 9/23 - 9/29**

- Introduce myself to studio art students via email, begin confirming participants and schedule availability
  - Availability due on Friday to confirm with videographers
    - Created availability spreadsheet (ongoing)
- Began annotated bibliography (ongoing)
- Confirm Carmel Buckley as second faculty member for oral defense
- 9/27 Meet with Ed Quinn, advisor
  - Turn in application, apply for graduation
- 9/29 Brynne McGregor and I met with Ziqi Zhou to document her photoshoot at the Book Loft
- 9/30 Begin posting on personal Instagram

### **Week of 9/30 - 10/6**

- 10/2 Meet with Merijn and Jeremy to touch base - loop Erik Pepple into next meeting to discuss marketing plan
- 10/2 Aubrey Elder and I meet with Avery McGrail for first introductions/document in her studio
- 10/2 Candi Hall asks to participate, Aubrey and I stop in studio
- Initial meetings with Aly Moore, Kelsey McShane, and Candi Hall scheduled. Second meetings with Avery and Ziqi scheduled

### **Week of 10/7 - 10/13**

- 10/9 Meeting with Kelsey McShane cancelled due to illness
- 10/14 Meeting with Aly Moore cancelled - out of town

**Week of 10/14 - 10/20**

- 10/16 Meet with Avery and Candi Hall for documenting processes
- 10/17 Meet with Erik and Emily about marketing plan
- 10/17 send email to all BFA artists about Instagram takeover and moderated discussion panel (deadline October 26)
- Begin scheduling sit-down interviews for first week of November
- Schedule meeting with videographers

**Week of 10/21 - 10/27**

- 10/21 Meet with videographers, confirm teaser videos for Nov. 5 (two one minute videos for social media, three artists in each)
  - 10/23 Confirm which three artists should be in each video
- 10/21 Meet with Aly Moore
- 10/22 Meet with Shelby Lowe
- 10/23 Meet with Ziqi (artist profile #1)
- 10/23 Meet with Kelsi McShane
- 10/23 Confirm artist profile #2 with Nick Durham
- 10/26 Meeting with Candi Hall cancelled
- Five sit-down interviews scheduled, need to schedule final “walking interview” with Aly

**Week of 10/28 - 11/3**

- 10/29 Receive proposals and statements (10/30 Jeremy shared with me)
- 10/30 Work on reflection, receive first rough draft of teaser trailer #1 from Brynne (amazing!!!)
- 10/30 Aubrey sits in on Shelby’s shoot solo for more footage (I was unable to make it), model ran late, ended up taking mock-footage
- 10/31 Brynne and I visit Shelby’s final shoot for more footage, Nick Durham joins (doesn’t have studio on campus)
  - Decide to do sit-down interview for Nick
- 10/31 Read over proposals and statements
- 10/31 make floor plan proposal, send to Jeremy (will miss meeting with Grad students on 11/2)

**Week of 11/4 - 11/10**

- 11/4 Write Ziqi and Nick’s artist profiles, send to Erik for publication
- 11/4 Teaser trailers finished and sent to Erik (will be published week of 11/12)
- 11/6 Videographer meeting to discuss interview style/format
- 11/6 Meet with Dana to confirm defense and tour dates



- 11/6 Formal sit-down interview at Urban Arts Space with Avery (Brynne and Aubrey filming)
- 11/8 Formal sit-down interview at Urban Arts Space with Shelby (Aubrey and Johnny Elder filming)
- 11/10 Formal sit-down interviews at Urban Arts Space with Ziqi and Kelsey (Aubrey and Johnny filming)

#### **Week of 11/11 - 11/17**

- Work on thesis - almost done
- 11/13 Meet with Emily and Jeremy to go over floor plan
- 11/14 Artist drop-off at UAS, artists sign up for install slots
  - Naomi schedules Instagram Takeovers in line with install dates
- 11/14 Erik reaches out about the Ohio Channel's interest in doing a piece. Naomi reaches out to Avery McGrail, Candi Hall to be artists interviewed by the Ohio Channel
- 11/15 Install at UAS begins, Naomi helps with install
- 11/15 Meet with Merijn to reflect on project and how to move forward
- 11/16 Help with install

#### **Week of 11/18 - 11/24**

- 11/18 Accompany Aly on Dollar Store trip for walking interview with Brynne
- 11/20 Help with install
- 11/20 Written materials due
- 11/20 Gallery walkthrough with Carmel via Skype and Dana
- Final edits on thesis

#### **Week of 11/25 - 12/1**

- 11/27 Oral defense with faculty committee at Urban Arts Space
- 11/27 Public walkthrough
- 11/30 Written materials and signed oral defense form due



*Figure 5.1. (top) Brynne McGregor filming Ziqi Zhou at the Book Loft. September 29, 2018.*

*Figure 5.2. (bottom) Avery McGrail and Naomi Kennedy in Avery's studio. October 3, 2018.*





*Figure 5.3. (top) Brynne McGregor filming Aly Moore in her home/studio. October 21, 2018.*

*Figure 5.4. (bottom) Shelby Lowe finalizing set for shoot with model. October 22, 2018.*



*Figure 5.5 (top) and Figure 5.6 (bottom). Stills from interview with Shelby Lowe.*

## References

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